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Full Length Research Paper

Using multimedia in teaching Islamic studies

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The sophistication of multimedia technologies nowadays gives a great challenge to educators in order to continuously play significant roles in the borderless globalisation of information era. This challenge should not be regarded as a threat but should be accepted as a great reward to education world, which is able to produce an amazing result if the tools are used correctly and wisely. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to discuss the use of multimedia in teaching and learning process. In this paper, researcher will share their experience in teaching Islamic Studies in Taylor's University College, Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia using multimedia as beneficial tools in enhancing learning process. In Islamic education, human's achievement in Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a sign of knowledge achievement that need to be used to find the truth. Hence, in order to guide students towards the truth and simultaneously to make the teaching and learning process enjoyable, researcher had used various multimedia tools. Among them are PowerPoint slides, video clips, mind map and internet. As a result, students found that Islamic Studies subject is very interesting and entertaining and it can be proven that it is not impossible to transform a dry and plain subject to be fun and interactive lesson.

Key words: Multimedia, Islamic studies, microsoft powerpoint, video, mind map.

INTRODUCTION

Islam gives such great importance to knowledge and education. When the Qur'an began to be revealed, the first word of its first verse was *Iqra'* which means "read". Thus, education is the starting point of every human development.

Education is a light that shows the mankind the right direction to surge. If education fails to inculcate self-discipline and commitment to achieve in the minds of student, it is not totally their fault. We as educators play an important role in making the learning process interesting and enjoyable. We have to convert education into a sport and learning process has to generate interest in the students and motivate them to stay back in the institution than to run away from it. Education should become a fun and thrill to them rather than burden and boredom (Damodharan and Rengarajan, 2007).

The purpose of education is not just making a student literate but adds rational thinking, knowledge ability, and self sufficiency. In order to achieve this purpose, effective and innovative teaching and learning methods are vital, especially in facing digital students' era. The digital revolution has resulted in one unintended consequence. Today's youth are much more media-centric than previous generations. In fact, many people believe that the brains of today's youth have actually become rewired to accommodate the thousands of hours they spend in front of computer screens watching and creating video, listening to music, and playing computer games. It also has been said that today's youth actually speak digitally. That is why, no wonder many have called this new generation the digital generation (Shelly, Cashman, Gunter and Gunter, 2006).

Understanding today's digital kids and how they learn has profound implications not only for how lecturers teach digital students, but also, and perhaps more importantly, for how lecturers reach them. Educational technology and multimedia can be valuable tools when they are integrated into the curriculum appropriately to achieve learning gains, particularly when they are combined with

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a twenty-first-century curriculum. Lecturers have to decide whether to try to pull digital students away from their native digital world or to motivate digital students by tapping into their digital world and using their natural inclination and inquisitiveness about all that is digital (Shelly, Cashman, Gunter and Gunter, 2006). The choice is in our hands. However, if we want to continuously grab students' attention, make them happy to learn and create an exciting learning environment, we need to follow the current and not against it.

In this case, the same goes to teaching Islamic Studies. Lecturers need to make some adjustments on how the subject should be taught in order to make it competitive relatively. Multimedia is one of the tools that able to suit the digital students' interest that able to make the lesson interesting and enjoyable. Moreover, multimedia is an interactive tool that combines a variety of elements, including text, graphics, audio, video and animation that able to arouse students' interest. Most students are not only auditory or visual learners, but also multi-sensory learners. Multimedia has the ability to capture the attention of the learner because it addresses a variety of learning style. Today's students expect to use digital media devices in their daily lives, so these devices, or similar media technology, should be woven seamlessly into their classroom experiences (Shelly, Cashman, Gunter and Gunter, 2006).

WHAT IS MULTIMEDIA?

The term multimedia by definition means "more than one media". According to Hofstetter (2001), multimedia is the use of computer to present and combine text, graphics, audio and video with links and tools that let the user navigate, interact, create and communicate. In other words, multimedia is the combination of various digital media, into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to convey information to an audience (Damodharan and Rengarajan, 2007; Butcher-Powell, 2005). Other than that, interactivity is also part of the elements that are required in order to complete interactive communication process through the use of multimedia (Jamalludin and Zaidatun, 2005).

Originally, a multimedia presentation did not have to be digital. For example, multimedia might have incorporated a slide show for visuals, a tape recorder for audio, and an overhead projector for text. But as software and hardware became capable of and adept at handling more than one media, the term multimedia was coined to define computer software applications and presentations that utilized more than one media (Shelly, Cashman, Gunter and Gunter, 2006).

WHY IS MULTIMEDIA IMPORTANT?

In the pre-technology education context, the teacher is the sender or the source, the educational material is the information or message, and the student is the receiver of the information. In terms of the delivery medium, the educator can deliver the message via the "chalk-and-talk" method and overhead projector (OHP) transparencies. This directed instruction model is a popular technique, which has been used for decades as an educational strategy in all institutions of learning (Damodharan and Rengarajan, 2007).

Basically, the teacher controls the instructional process, the content is delivered to the entire class and the teacher tends to emphasize factual knowledge. In other words, the teacher delivers the lecture content and the students listen to the lecture. Thus, the learning mode tends to be passive and the learners play little part in their learning process. It has been found in most universities by many teachers and students that the conventional lecture approach in classroom is of limited effectiveness in both teaching and learning. In such a lecture, students assume a purely passive role and their concentration fades off after 15 - 20 min (Damodharan and Rengarajan, 2007). Some limitations which may prevail in traditional teaching method are:

- Teaching in classroom using chalk and talk is "one way flow" of information (Figure 1).
- Teachers often continuously talk for an hour without knowing students response and feedback.
- The material presented is only based on lecturer notes and textbooks.
- Teaching and learning are concentrated on "plug and play" method rather than practical aspects.
- The handwriting of the lecturer decides the fate of the subject.
- There is insufficient interaction with students in classroom.
- More emphasis has been given on theory without any practical and real life time situations.
- Learning from memorization but not understanding.
- Marks rather than result oriented.

In order to solve the problem, multimedia can be effectively used for instructional purposes (Burden and Byrd, 1999). The use of multimedia in teaching and learning is not only able to maintain students' interest but also able to make them enjoy learning. Furthermore, Cairncross and Mannion (2001) pointed out multimedia has the potential to create high quality learning environments. The key elements of multiple media, user control over the delivery of information, and interactivity can be used to enhance the learning process creating integrated learning environments.

Multimedia-based learning is becoming increasingly popular. While it has limitations, and certainly should not be seen as a substitute for face to face interaction, it does have numerous advantages for both teachers and students. For example, the information contained on the internet is unlimited and evolving. It is up to date, inexpensive to obtain, and searchable. It also reflects the views

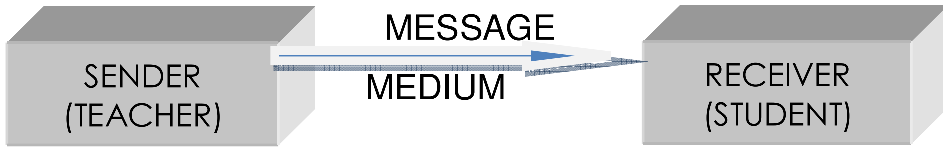


Figure 1. Teaching in classroom using chalk and talk

of many authors and sources of information. Multimedia can also be highly interactive and engaging through the use of animation, audio and video files, games and on-line discussions. All these can be undertaken at any time and at any place and without the need for an outside workshop facilitator (Fien, 2009).

Multimedia also is fast emerging as a basic skill that will be as important to life in the twenty-first century as reading is now. In fact, multimedia is changing the nature of reading itself. Instead of limiting us to the linear presentation of text, multimedia makes reading dynamic by expanding the text in certain topics. This is accomplished not only by providing more text but by bringing it to life with sound, pictures, music and video (Hofstetter, 2001; Rozinah, 2005).

Besides that, today's students are essentially different from previous generations in the way they think, in the way they access, absorb, interpret, process, and apply information and above all, in the way they view, interact, communicate in this technology rich world. Today's digital kids like watching TV, listening to music on their iPods, checking out school pictures on their digital cameras, listening to their favourite shows via podcasts, talking on their cell phones, instant messaging their friends and blogging. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of this scenario is that they are doing all of these activities while completing their math homework assignment. As a result, multimedia becomes an imperative tool in teaching and learning process in order to equalize their competency, and most importantly to maintain their interest in a classroom.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

At the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca in 1977, Islamic Education was characterized as follows:

"Education should aim at the balanced growth of total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses. Education should therefore cater for the growth of man in all aspects; spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively and motivate all these aspects towards goods and the attainment of perfection. The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large" (Mahayudin, 1999).

In other words, education in Islamic perspective is a process of transferring moral values or knowledge that develop the whole potential of human nature, physically and emotionally with solid and balanced individuals that able to carry out their responsibility as God's caliph on the earth (Ahmad, Ahmad Fahim, Md. Saufi, Dziaudin, Nilofar and Siti Rashidah, 2006). Thus, with the advance development of information and communication technology (ICT), Muslim educators need to equip themselves with ICT skills especially multimedia in order to cater the growth of students in all aspects; spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively. If we fulfil this, only then we able to produce balanced students spiritually, physically and mentally, because multimedia tools are part and parcel of their lives nowadays.

For a Muslim who believes in Allah's power, human's achievement in ICT is a sign of knowledge achievement that in fact need to be used in order to find a truth as Allah said in Surah Fussilat (41: 53):

"We shall show them our signs in the horizons, and in their own souls, until it becomes clear to them that it, namely, the Qur'ān, is the truth, is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness to all things"

Nowadays, we are facing digital students who are living in their native digital world. According to Marc Prensky (2001), digital kids are the digital natives and teachers are the digital immigrants. Today's students speak digitally; they are all native speakers of the digital language. If we educators do not take up the challenge to be compatible with students' ability, we will be lagging behind. The worst thing is our role as knowledge disseminator, skill enhancer and value cultivator will be no more significant, since students able to find everything they need outside classrooms but without any guidance. If this happens, we as Muslim educators are responsible for it, based on Prophet Muhammad's hadith:

"Every one of you is a caretaker, and every caretaker is responsible for what he is caretaker of" (Narrated by Imam Bukhari).

So, as "caretakers" whether we like it or not, we need to

equip ourselves with ICT skills especially multimedia to enhance students' learning by making the learning process not only exciting and enjoyable, but effective as well. Multimedia allows teachers to use a combination of technology tools to appeal to an array of learning styles digitally. If integrated properly, multimedia also has the capability to stimulate imagination and develop critical thinking skills all while allowing students to take an active role in their own learning.

USING MULTIMEDIA IN TEACHING ISLAMIC STUDIES

Islamic Studies also known as MPW 1143 is a compulsory subject for all Muslim students in Private Higher Education Institution (IPTS) in Malaysia. Islamic Studies subject aimed at producing the Malaysian citizens in particular the Muslim graduates whom have good understanding on Islam as a way of life that able to resolve any difficulties and challenges. The ulterior purpose of having this subject is to prepare Muslim students with strong Islamic foundation before they further their studies overseas.

The syllabus of this subject is not much difference from the syllabus that the students learnt in secondary school. The difference is only in terms of coverage, which is little bit wider. The challenge to the lecturer here is what kind of teaching method should be used in order to increase students' interest or at least maintain their interest in the subject in order to achieve the learning outcomes? Based on researcher's experience, most of students who attended the class assume that they will learn the same thing they learnt in secondary school. When they have this kind of mindset, the lecturer need to work hard to change it, because it will affect their way of learning, response to teaching and lastly their performance in the subject.

In almost five years teaching Islamic Studies in Taylor's University College, Subang Jaya, one of the private university colleges in Malaysia, researcher had tried many kinds of teaching tools and techniques in order to make the lesson interesting and exciting. Over that period of time, researcher able to see the development in teaching and learning process while using different kind of tools and techniques from time to time. Multimedia tool started being used in 2005, when OHP transparency notes had been transformed into Microsoft PowerPoint slides since all the classrooms have been equipped by computer and Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) projector. While in 2007, Islamic Studies students had been asked to publish a video clip with Islamic theme. Lastly in 2008, mind map software had been employed to convert some of the notes into mind map concept. This concept is really useful for teaching and learning process, because it is able to integrate all points in just one slide. Besides that, researcher also had linked certain PowerPoint slides with related internet website by using hyperlink tool.

MICROSOFT POWERPOINT SLIDES AS A TOOL IN TEACHING ISLAM

Microsoft PowerPoint programme had been used to modify the contents of the material. It helped researcher to represent them in a more meaningful way, using different media elements. All the OHP transparency notes that had been transformed into PowerPoint slides were modified and customized for the final presentation. By incorporating multimedia elements into the project, the students were able to learn better since they use multiple sensory modalities, which would make them more motivated to pay more attention to the information presented and retain the information better.

While transforming notes into PowerPoint slides, researcher was not only transferring texts to the slides, but also inserting some graphics related to the topics in order to make students understand them better. Sometimes, another touching slides of advice with soothing background music would be linked to certain topic slides. According to Jamalludin and Zaidatun (2005), by putting an image that relates to the day's concepts, playing music or having a short video clip able to draw students' attention or stimulate discussion. The impact is very effective, when the students gave their fullest attention in the classroom (Figures 2 and 3).

MAKING VIDEO CLIP AS STUDENTS' PROJECT

Creating multimedia projects is both challenging and exciting. Fortunately, there are many technologies that available for developers to create these innovative and interactive multimedia applications (Vaughan, 1998). These technologies include Windows Movie Maker to publish a video, Adobe Photoshop and Premier to create edit graphics and video files respectively, Sound Forge and 3D Studio Max to create and/or edit sound and animation files respectively (Damodharan and Rengarajan, 2007).

Another advantage of creating multimedia projects in the classroom setting is that when students create multimedia projects, they tend to do this in a group environment. By working in a group, the students would have to learn to work cooperatively and collaboratively, using their group skills and a variety of activities to accomplish the projects overall objectives.

In order to get active students' involvement in the learning process, researcher had asked them to publish a video clip with Islamic theme in a group work. There were given between two to three weeks to finish it. Although they were not really confident to do it initially, at the end of the day most of them able to produce good even excellent product. Each of the video clips would be screened to their friends in the class and their performance would be evaluated rightly after that. Based on students' feedback, the activity done has really unlocked their creativity



Figure 2. Inserting some graphics into PowerPoint slide able to stimulate audience thinking in a better way.

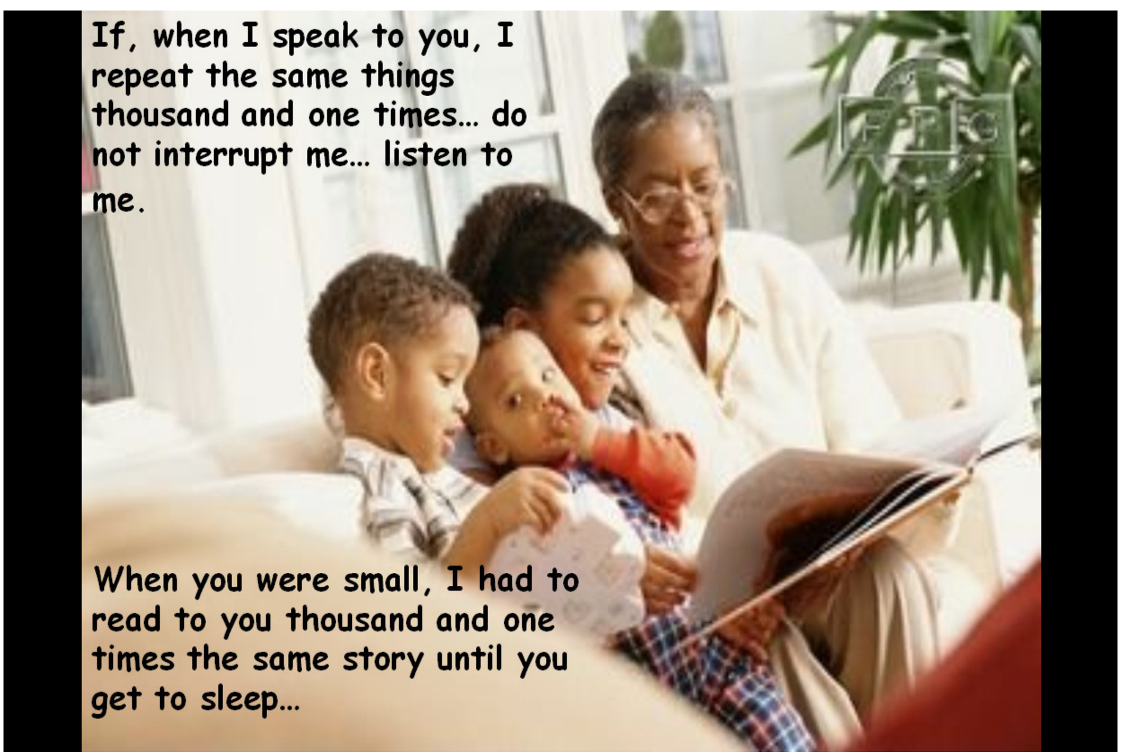


Figure 3. Microsoft PowerPoint manage to combine all meaningful texts, amazing graphics and soothing background music in order to create a wonderful slide that able to touch students' heart.



Figure 4. Publishing a video clip can be an exciting students' group activity where they work together and share different knowledge, ideas and experience in producing a good product to their audience.

and unleashed their hidden talents (Figure 4).

MIND MAPPING AS ONE OF THE INNOVATIVE TEACHING TOOLS

Other than Power Point slides, Free Mind software also had been used to create mind map notes. A mind map is the easiest way to put information into our brain and to take information out of our brain. It is creative and effective means of note-taking that literally "maps out" our thoughts (Buzan, 2005). The mind map shows clearly how the points are all associated and linked together (Khoo, 2007).

Researcher had transformed some of the PowerPoint slides that rich with facts into mind map notes in order to boost their memory system because in mind map we just use a few words and sometimes a few images to explain a lot of things and at the same time enable them to understand the topic better. "Islam as a Civilization" was one of the topics that have been transformed into mind map notes. Researcher found that by using only PowerPoint slides was not enough in presenting the topic because the students could not see the correlation between the points presented very well. By using mind map technique, 10 PowerPoint slides able to be compressed into one page simple but complete note. Students found that mind map is really helpful in enhancing their understanding. Undoubtedly, mind map is a very effective and useful tool for teaching and learning (Figure 5).

INTERNET AS A WONDERFUL TEACHING AID

In the borderless globalisation of information era, internet plays a vital role as knowledge disseminator. Nothing can stop us from getting what we want to know, we want to see and we want to listen because internet can be accessed by everybody. Whether it is harmful or useful, it depends on us how to decide. One of the famous websites that had been used was YouTube website. YouTube is a popular video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips (Duffy, 2008). YouTube has become an enormously popular form of Web 2.0 new media. A recent article in Wired cites an average of 65,000 uploads and 100 million videos viewed per day on YouTube (Godwin-Jones, 2007). This number shows how great the response that YouTube gets from the viewers especially teenagers.

That is why, in teaching Islamic Studies, researcher also had integrated some related video clips from this website into teaching and learning process, because video can be a powerful educational and motivational tool. However, a great deal of the medium's power lies not in it-

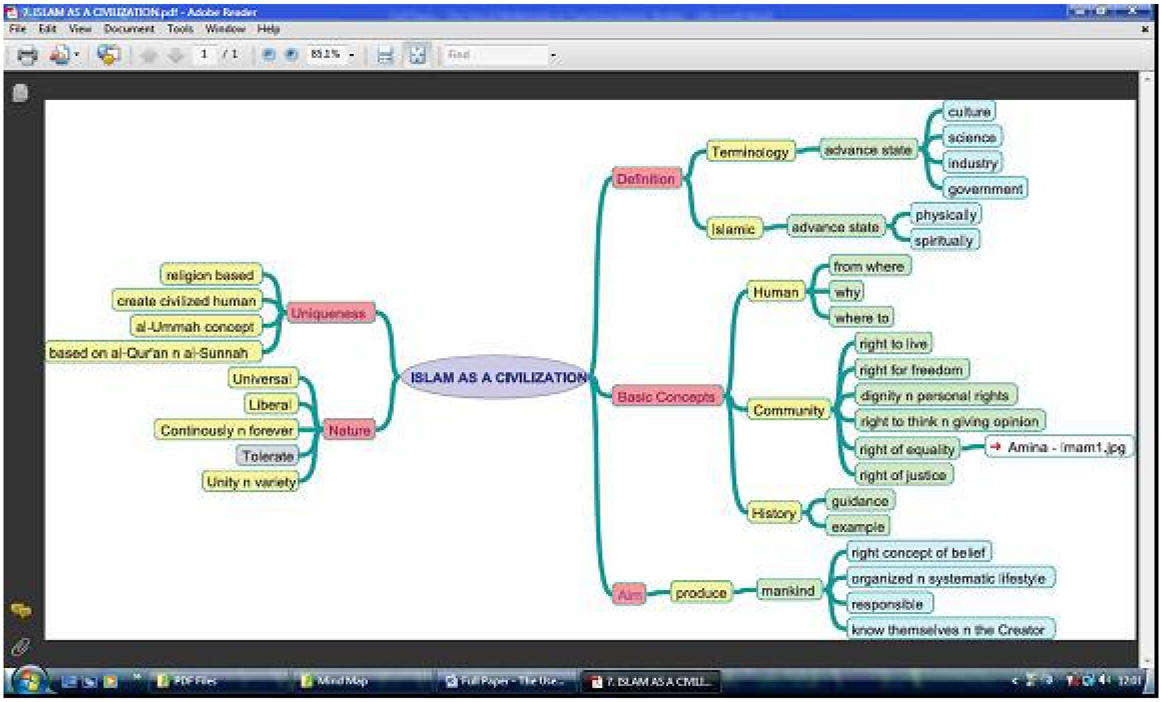


Figure 5. Mind map is a beneficial tool that able to associate all the points in a chapter in a piece of paper effectively.



Figure 6. YouTube video clips able to stimulate students' thinking if it is used wisely.

itself but a means toward achieving learning goals and objectives. Effective instructional video is not television- to-student instruction but rather teacher-to-student instruction, with video as a vehicle for discovery (Duffy, 2008) (Figure 6).

STUDENTS' COMMENTS

Based on students' comments that has been written in the course evaluation, out of 176 South Australian Matri-

culation scholarship students July, 2008 intake, 48.3% of the students strongly agreed and 43.8% of the students agreed that the course content was effectively presented. Most of them enjoyed with the teaching and learning styles that had been applied in the Islamic Studies class. Below are some of the students' comments that have been taken from the course evaluation:

"The class is interesting and very interactive. Ustazah have managed to make the class fun and at the same time full with knowledge and information. It is hope, that ustazah's way of teaching is maintained..."

"I think the lecturer gives very helpful responses and information. She made class not as boring as I thought. Keep it up."

"Ustazah has taught much more than merely chapters of Islamic Studies, she opened the minds and captivated us with the beautiful aspects of Islam itself. This is truly the study of Islam, wholesomely....".

"Ustazah is very knowledgeable and teaches many new things about Islam. Fun and entertaining".

"I really enjoy Islamic Studies! I disagree with the system that Islamic Studies is being taught in the 1st semester only. It should be an on-going course.".

"The lecturer is great and knowledgeable. Get attention from students by showing video is good idea."

"Very interesting. Ustazah has been using diverse methods of teaching; video aids....charts...".

"Ustazah is the best! I love her teaching me Islamic Studies. I am able to understand well whatever she had thought me as she has very good teaching and presentation skills. These had definitely helped the learning process to become easier and more interesting. Thank you ustazah!"

"The way she taught is creative and fun. It can be easily understood. It has increased my Islamic Studies knowledge."

"Islamic Studies is very interesting and joyful. The subject was not very stressful. The lecturer did very well handling out the lecture."

"The teacher is super-cool and the classes were conducted in light and fun condition. All of the lectures are pack with useful knowledge. Love you ustazah..".

"Everything is good and as nice as the lecturer. I never have such an interesting Islamic classes as this lecture.".

The comments received were very encouraging compared to the comments from previous batches when researcher only used OHP transparency notes in the early teaching years. Simultaneously, students' interest and performance have increased tremendously.

Undeniably, using multimedia in class really gives an impressive impact to teaching and learning process.

CONCLUSION

Technology is changing the classroom experience. Information and Communication Technology has made many innovations in teaching and learning process in order to accommodate challenging digital students' needs. Consequently, we need to have interactive teaching and learning tools in order to ensure the learning outcomes able to be achieved. This is inevitable with the introduction of multimedia technology. Hence, we as educators need to take up the challenge by equipping ourselves with multimedia skills to enhance students' study interest.

From the above, researcher found that by having a mixed of multimedia tools in teaching and learning process, able to change students' negative mindset towards a subject when they enjoy learning and feel motivated to participate in class activities. Based on the students' comments from the course evaluation, researcher found that it is not impossible to make a dry and plain subject like Islamic Studies to be interactive lesson by using multimedia tools. If multimedia is able to transform Islamic Studies becomes an interesting subject, it also able to transform other dry and plain even difficult subjects become thrilling. It depends on that respective lecturer on how to apply innovative and creative teaching methods in order to accommodate digital students' needs in this borderless world. The most important thing is we need to unlock our creativity in order to be creative.

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